



James E. McGreevey
Governor

Susan Bass Levin
Commissioner

Vol. 6 No. 2
January 2002

Community Matters

A Newsletter for the Employees of the Department of Community Affairs

PERSPECTIVE

'Dream Job'

by Commissioner Susan Bass Levin

Call me biased, but I think DCA is the best department in state government, and I am so happy and honored to be called your commissioner.

As a former mayor I know how important the programs and services of DCA are to local communities. Your professional work lies at the heart of so many of the issues that families face: revitalization, sprawl, affordable housing, property taxes, equal rights for women, to name a few.

Recently I told a newspaper reporter that this was my "dream job," because those are the issues I have cared most about in my career.

The artist Vincent Van Gogh once said, "Great things are not done by impulse, but by a series of small things brought together."

That to me describes the work of DCA. This department makes great things possible by bringing the small things together. A downtown is coming back. Why? Because DCA helped people there start a Main Street program. A building that has been vacant for decades is being fixed up because of the Rehabilitation Subcode. A family just closed on their first home thanks to programs we have in Housing or over at HMFA.

We've got a lot of different things going on in this department. But all of these different areas are dedicated to one thing: Helping people and communities. And that's a pretty nice job to have. That's something to feel good about as you're putting your coat on in the morning to head off to work.

Along with that tradition of service there's also a spirit of innovation at DCA. We're not afraid to try new things. We're idea people. And that goes for everyone. Keep those ideas coming. The state needs them. It needs your best ideas and your best efforts now more than ever.

I promise that you'll get mine. I don't pretend to have all the answers but I promise to give my best, and working together, we will reach even higher, and make this great department even better.



Susan Bass Levin (center) is sworn in as DCA Commissioner in Trenton. She is joined by her brother, Fred Bass, and her daughters Lisa (left) and Amy Levin (right). Appellate Court Judge Francine I. Axelrad presided.

Susan Bass Levin Takes DCA Helm

Legislators Praise New Commissioner

Amid bi-partisan praise from legislators, Susan Bass Levin was confirmed by the state Senate last Thursday as the 13th commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs.

Following the confirmation, Commissioner Levin was joined by family members, friends, lawmakers and local officials for a swearing in ceremony in the General Assembly chamber. Appellate Court Judge Francine I. Axelrad, a long-time friend, administered the oath of office.

Upon taking the oath, Commissioner Levin resigned as mayor of Cherry Hill. She had been the mayor of the 70,000-person suburb since 1988.

Commissioner Levin said she considers DCA commissioner a "dream job."

"Everything I've cared about or worked on is at DCA," she said. "Our issues are critically important to the families and communities of this state."

Legislators from both parties took turns praising the choice of Levin as commissioner.

"The efficiencies, competence, intelligence and insight Susan brought to Cherry Hill will serve her and other communities well as commissioner of

Community Affairs," said Sen. John Adler, D-Camden.

Sen. Wayne Bryant, D-Camden, described the commissioner as a "dynamic leader."

"She is one of the most creative women I know and she is bright beyond one's imagination," said Sen. Bryant. "She is thinking outside the box every day. She's probably four miles ahead of us, and at the same time, she makes you feel important to the process."

Sen. Diane Allen, R-Burlington, noted that the Senate vote to confirm Levin was unanimous among Democrats and Republicans.

"She is a great role model for women throughout the state," said Sen. Allen. "A lot of people in Cherry Hill are sorry to see her go."

Sen. Shirley Turner, D-Mercer, said Levin "has always been there, not just for women, but for the unrepresented and the underrepresented."

Once Commissioner Levin was confirmed along with other Cabinet nominees, the scene shifted down the hall from the Senate to the Assembly chamber for the swearing in ceremony.

Continued on page 3

Downtown Scholars Get Busy

DCA's Downtown Revitalization Institute, a training program that teaches the fine points of creating vibrant commercial centers, recently kicked off its 2002 season with a seminar on how to line up the financial resources and public support for downtown improvements.

A class of approximately 50 local officials and downtown advocates heard from two nationally acclaimed business consultants during the January 29-30 session at Thomas Edison State College in Trenton.

"The cost of this kind of training would normally be beyond the reach of most local communities," said DCA Commissioner Susan Bass Levin. "You'd have to travel to a national conference to find a comparable quality of instruction."

The Institute, sponsored by DCA's Main Street New Jersey program, resumes in April with a seminar focusing on architecture and design.

Main Street New Jersey, a DCA program, has been helping local communities across the state to revitalize their traditional commercial business districts since 1989. In addition to offering the Downtown Revitalization Institute four times each year, the office provides training and technical assistance on a continuing basis to 14 selected Main Street communities and 43 communities with Special Improvement Districts.

Since its creation, the Main Street program has helped participating towns create approximately 780 new businesses and 4,300 new jobs.

SAMP Dumped At Meadowlands

The New Jersey Meadowlands Commission has voted to withdraw from the Special Area Management Plan (SAMP), ending an embattled approach to mapping the future of the Meadowlands District that had failed to yield consensus in 13 years.

"The SAMP process was started to provide protection to vital wetlands and certainty to affected landowners and communities," said DCA Commissioner Susan Bass Levin. "After 13 years, it has done neither. We need to replace this failed process with new leadership and a renewed commitment to protect this precious natural resource, while assuring needed growth for the region."

In its resolution withdrawing as the local sponsor of the SAMP process, the commission found that modifications to the SAMP in April 1999 "caused great concerns among stakeholders and the agencies that participated in the process." The commission noted that it has had no activity related to the revision of the SAMP for nearly a year and a half.

The SAMP process began in 1988 with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

"We need decisive action, not a never ending process, if we are going to protect the threatened wetlands and bring needed jobs to the region," Commissioner Levin said.

Senior Apartments Open in Newark



DCA Commissioner Susan Bass Levin (right) joins with Newark Mayor Sharpe James and Newark Councilwoman Bessie Walker at a ribbon cutting for a senior citizen apartment complex in the city's South Ward.

Senior citizens have an affordable new housing option in Newark after last week's ribbon cutting at the Donald C. Bradley Apartments, a 44-unit affordable rental complex in

the Clinton Hill neighborhood of the city's South Ward.

The \$4.6 million building was made possible through financing from DCA and the HMFA, with additional funding from the City of Newark.

"This is a time of change in state government, but one thing that won't change is our mission to provide decent housing for seniors and lower-income families," said DCA Commissioner Susan Bass Levin. "That commitment will continue."

The apartments were built on a lot that stood empty for many years. All of the units are reserved for senior citizens earning not more than 50 percent of the area income.

DCA provided \$1.54 million from its Balanced Housing program. The developer also received \$2.4 million in permanent financing from the HMFA, as well as non-competitive, federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits.

Officials Mark Start of Camden Housing

Federal, state and Camden City officials this month marked the start of construction of a major mixed-income housing development on the site of the now-demolished Westfield Acres public housing project.

The officials, including DCA Commissioner Susan Bass Levin, participated in groundbreaking ceremonies for the \$13.8 million first phase of the 197-unit Baldwin's Run rental housing development – part of an overall 516-unit rental and home ownership initiative on the 23.9-acre site and in the surrounding area.

The revitalization effort will also include support services to nearly 300 former residents of Westfield Acres and a variety of neighborhood investments.

"The neighborhood is coming alive," said Commissioner Levin. "Today it's the sound of construction. Soon it will be the sounds of children playing. Hundreds of new, affordable homes will provide a fresh start for families of all incomes and a fresh start for this whole neighborhood."

The state had pledged \$33.4 million in financing to support the Camden Housing Authority's successful application for \$35 million in federal HOPE VI funding for the development. The state funds are derived from the Balanced Housing Program at DCA and various programs of the HMFA.

The HOPE VI funds will also be used to make major investments in the neighborhood, including a community facility and commercial development.

Commissioner Susan Bass Levin participates in groundbreaking ceremony at Camden development with Rep. Rob Andrews (left) and U.S. Sen. Robert Torricelli (center).



MLK Event Highlights Islam, Arab People



Commissioner Susan Bass Levin opens DCA's Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event, a seminar about people of the followers of Islam and people of Middle Eastern descent. Seated beside her from left to right are Samar Khalaf, Imam Abubakr and Robin Parker.

DCA's Martin Luther King Day observance put a spotlight on the Islamic faith and people of Mid-Eastern descent.

A panel of six speakers shared a range of viewpoints and engaged in spirited discussion with the audience of approximately 50 DCA employees.

In welcoming remarks, DCA Commissioner Susan Bass Levin said DCA was a fitting place to pay tribute to Dr. King, since the department "takes up his work" in the way it improves communities and people's lives.

"I see it in Newark, in the new affordable housing for seniors, and in Camden," she said, adding, "We are following in Dr.

King's footsteps."

Keynote speaker Mr. Robin Parker, the former head of Office of Bias Crimes in the New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety, now executive director of Beyond Diversity Resource Center, noted that there had been 50 bias crimes against Muslims in New Jersey since September 11, and hundreds more nationally.

Mr. Parker described the basic challenge of human relations in a diverse society as one of seeing the "essential humanity" everyone shares, while also recognizing that a person's ethnic and religious background forms an important part of who they are.

"We're one of the most diverse states in the nation, so we can show the way, and you can show the way, here today," he said. "We can demonstrate to the nation how to get it right."

Program organizer **Deirdre L. Webster Cobb**, DCA's Affirmative Action Officer, brought together a panel that illustrated the diversity of Arab society and Islam's followers.

The group featured Samar Khalaf, a member of the Syrian Orthodox Church, who spoke about Arab Christians; and Imam Abubakr, of the Muslim Center of Middlesex County, who presented a brief overview of the Muslim faith.

Also, Ms. Sherine El-Abd, commissioner of the New Jersey Commission on Civil Rights, acted as moderator and described her experience as an Arab-American Muslim. Ms. Sarah Elshazly, of the Islamic Circle of North America, spoke about Muslim women and family life; and Imam Dr. Abdul-Malik R. Ali, of Masjidut-Taqwa of Trenton, discussed the history of American Black Muslims.

Chief of Staff Named

Commissioner Susan Bass Levin has named **Marge DellaVecchia** as her chief of staff.

Marge, a licensed professional planner, has served in two key positions in Cherry Hill over the past 13 years, first as director of community development and then as director of engineering.


As director of community development, Marge interacted with DCA on many issues. In her engineering post, she managed and directed the township's capital improvement budgets.

Marge said she looks forward to continuing her long association with Commissioner Levin.

"I have such an attraction to her roll-up-your-sleeves and get-the-job-done work ethic," said Marge. "She makes the hard, right decisions, so I'm proud to be with her in this endeavor."

As a Rutgers graduate student, Marge got her first taste of public service, creating and developing a DCA Neighborhood Preservation initiative in Morristown.

"I love government service," said Marge. "I feel good about what we do."



No Smoking

Commissioner Susan Bass Levin strongly reminds employees that there is no smoking permitted in the front of the building or near the stairs leading to the front entrance.

Alarms Installed

An audible alarm has been installed on the rear door and the door at the loading dock. Employees are prohibited from exiting through these doors except in an emergency.



Susan Bass Levin...continued

As she took the oath of office, Commissioner Levin was surrounded by her daughters, Amy, who flew in from London, and Lisa, who made the trip from California, her parents, Max and Harriet Bass, who flew in from Florida and her brother, Fred, from New York City.

Among those in attendance were Assembly Speaker Albio Sires, D-Hudson, Assembly Majority Leader Joe Roberts, D-Camden, former Gov. Jim Florio, Camden County Freeholder Director Jeffrey Nash and a host of local officials from Cherry Hill and surrounding municipalities.

"As I look around the room my heart just tells me how very lucky I am," said Commissioner Levin.

The new commissioner said she looks forward to working with the employees of DCA to further the department's mission.

As a mayor of South Jersey's largest suburb, Ms. Levin is no stranger to DCA.

"I know the issues. And I understand the challenges," said Commissioner Levin.

Commissioner Levin will combine strong leadership and a commitment to public service in her new role.

Over the past 14 years in Cherry Hill, she was responsible for policy decisions, legal analysis and implementation of program relating to land use, open space acquisition, infrastructure planning, economic development, transportation, affordable housing and environmental protection.

She received her J.D. with Honors from George Washington Law School in 1975 and her B.A. from the University of Rochester where she was a member of Phi Beta Kappa.

Commissioner Levin serves on the Board of Directors for Ceasefire New Jersey, Women's Fund of New Jersey, New Jersey Alliance for Action and the South Jersey Development Council. She is also a member of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, former Co-Chair of the New Jersey Higher Educational Alliance, a founding member of the Cherry Hill Alliance Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse and founder of Side-by-Side, a support group for victims of domestic violence.

She has received the Governor's Award for Mayoral Volunteerism, Philadelphia Business Journal Women of Distinction Award, Douglass College's New Jersey Women of Achievement Award, Barbara Boggs Sigmund Award and Woman of the Year of various civic organizations.



Community Building News

Question of the Month: Security Issues

As you are aware, DCA has established a Security Task Force, which is assigned the task of devising strategies and procedures to assure the safety and security of our workplace. Several task force recommendations have been implemented, such as employee ID checks, escorting visitors, mail opening procedures and, most recently, the installation of alarms on the rear and loading dock doors.

Community Building Initiative's "Question of the Month" stated that DCA has taken action to improve security in the workplace and asked that employees share any comments or suggestions they may have about our security procedures.

Many respondents expressed concern about the ease of ingress and egress through the rear door of the building despite the ban on its use. With the installation of the alarm, this breach of safety procedures should cease. After a fire drill, no one will be able to re-enter the building through the rear door.

One respondent also was concerned that the ID check was inefficient because the IDs do not have expiration dates and because people entering the building are not required by the design of the entrance to file past the guards close enough for an accurate view of IDs. The task force is investigating acceptable methods to channel people through a checkpoint that would allow guards to examine IDs more closely. Such a system must be "retractable" for safety during building evacuations. Employees will soon be issued digital IDs, the validity of which guards will be able to confirm through the computer, thus weeding out expired IDs.

Another respondent suggested that guards require visitors to present a formal ID that would be held at the desk until their departure and that guards, not office personnel, escort visitors to their destination. The task force has recommended that visitors present ID to the guards. However, retaining the ID at the desk may be problematic in that visitors may leave without retrieving their ID. With the number of visitors arriving each day at DCA, to have one guard assigned to escort them to their destinations could, at times, create substantial delays. Also, office personnel are better able to direct visitors to their destinations. For these reasons, the task force believes that the current system is more efficient.

Finally, respondents noted that there is no effort to check IDs as employees return to the building after a fire drill and that the security desk is sometimes not staffed before 7 a.m. even though the building is open. The task force will be addressing these issues over the next few weeks and new procedures will be recommended. If any employee has a recommendation to improve security at DCA, please contact Greg Vida by E-mail.

Upcoming Events

- Feb. 5 Basket Making
Room 129 - 12 p.m. to 1 p.m.
- Feb. 7 The "Ins" & "Outs" of Outlook, Part 2
Room 521 - 2:30 p.m.
- Feb. 26 Making Diversity Work
Room 621 - 2:30 p.m.



DCA Nursery: Who is this Cutie Pie???

Hint: She still has the twinkle in her eye and she may be found on the 8th floor.

Reminder

Several weeks ago, there was a general broadcast concerning the "Work Circle Program." The goal of this project is to produce a list of recommendations that will maximize savings and improve communication, morale, service and production. The work circle will include about 20 people who will be selected from the pool of volunteers. This broadcast included an application. If you are interested, please fill out the application and return to Dianne Neal in Room 713B or via e-mail. All employees are encouraged to get involved. Be sure to get your supervisor's approval.

Division of Codes and Standards Presentation

In the latest in a series of division presentations, Codes and Standards Director Bill Connolly told an employee audience that the division is a direct service organization dealing with the public on a daily basis.

The division is self-sustaining through fees and penalties.

The division's bureaus are responsible for inspecting elevators, hotels and motels, multiple dwellings, rooming and boarding homes, liquefied petroleum gas, amusement rides, boilers, state buildings, local inspections, shelters and halfway houses, lead safety abatement and asbestos.

Bill also explained that the division enforces many codes, such as building, energy, electric, fire, plumbing and barrier-free, to name a few.

The division is also responsible for the Boarding Home Loan Fund, installation of sprinklers in fraternities and sororities, residential site improvement standards, the New Home Warranty Program, builders' licensing, planned real estate development, continuing care facilities, code assistance and landlord-tenant relations.

Bill's objective for the division is "to be the best we can be." It was obvious by the look on his face when he spoke about the employees in his division that he is very proud of their accomplishments and the professional service they provide.

Photos in a Snap

A recent employee presentation on digital cameras proved extremely popular.

One of the topics discussed included storing pictures on your computer. It was explained that pictures are made up of "pixels" or dots and the more dots the better the resolution. There are two settings on a computer. One is known as JPEG and the other is TIF. JPEG is 72 Dpi (dots per inch) and is preferable for e-mailing pictures, as it takes much less time to receive. However, the resolution is not as good as TIF, which is 200-240 DPI, and is better for storing in your computer. Photo Shop Elements, was mentioned as a decent software package. It was recommended that those interested in purchasing a digital camera, check out website www.dpreview.com.

Correction: Correction to Community Building Initiative's Annual Report: In error, Marilyn Mann was listed as a previous committee member. In fact, Marilyn Mann is still an active member in the Family/ Work/ Employee Interaction/Open Communication Committee.